

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Office of Current Intelligence  
19 November 1965

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Succession Problem in Portugal

Summary

1. Antonio de Oliverira Salazar, the aging prime minister who wields all political power in Portugal, is unlikely to be replaced until he is incapacitated or dies. At that time the military will use the constitutional procedures to ensure an orderly succession. There is no leading candidate to succeed Salazar, but the choice is likely to be someone close to the present regime. Any changes in the post-Salazar government will be slow. If the situation in Portuguese Africa should eventually cause a division in the regime power groups, however, the opposition will have an opening and civil strife may eventually erupt.

2. Prime Minister Salazar is now 76 years old. This all-powerful leader reportedly has stated that he would like to retire, but that his sense of duty will not permit it in light of the situation in Portuguese Africa. He has shown no real sign of being ready to retire or even to groom a successor, however, and the choice will probably be held off until he is incapacitated or dies. Although there are frequent rumors that Salazar is in ill health, and he had a serious illness in 1959, we believe his health is now reasonably good. Consequently the succession problem remains in the background.

Legal Provisions

3. Under the Portuguese system, the President of the Republic is only a figurehead, and Prime Minister Salazar exercises supreme power. His acts are not subject to legislative or judicial approval. Salazar has indicated that he expects to be replaced in a routine manner in accordance with the provisions of the Portuguese Constitution. These give the President of the Republic the sole power of appointment

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and dismissal of the prime minister. There is no constitutional provision for legislative involvement in either the selection or subsequent approval of the President's choice. This is the one important power which the President possesses, although there has been no occasion to use it since the constitution was adopted in 1933.

4. Salazar has seen to it that the President has always been a regime supporter who can be depended upon to designate a prime minister who will be acceptable to the present power groups in the country. Up through the election of 1958 the President was elected by direct suffrage of a restricted electorate. In that election the opposition candidate, the late General Humberto Delgado, broke with the regime to run. He won 25 percent of the vote, enough for the regime to amend the law to provide indirect suffrage by an Electoral College. Under the revised law the 70-year-old Admiral Americo Thomaz was reelected without opposition last July to another seven-year term. Because of his age, President Thomaz reportedly was reluctant to run again, but the difficulty of finding another candidate who could preserve the present apparently satisfactory relationship between the presidency and Premier Salazar evidently persuaded him to stay on. Thomaz can be depended upon to make a choice acceptable to the regime if Salazar goes within the next seven years.

#### The Decision Makers

5. Behind the constitutional machinery that will probably be used to choose a successor will be the important backers of the Salazar regime--the armed forces, the wealthy property-owning class, and the Roman Catholic Church. Of these, the armed forces are most likely to control the succession. Although there have been occasional instances of military opposition to Salazar, the top leadership of the armed forces is conservative and would almost certainly favor a continuation of the present regime's style and policies.

6. The regime depends upon its Public Security Police and the National Republican Guard to maintain law and order.



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Possible Successors

7. The successor is likely to be someone close to the present regime, a former cabinet minister or possibly a military figure. There is no front runner, however, and no present cabinet member is likely to be chosen. One prominent figure long thought to be the man to watch as a possible successor is Marcelo Caetano, former minister of the presidency and former rector of the University of Lisbon. Others who in the past have been mentioned as possibilities are Theotonio Pereira (a former cabinet minister and former ambassador), Adriano Moreira (former overseas minister now at the University of Lisbon), Admiral Manuel Sarmiento Rodrigues (former governor of Mozambique) and General Julio Botelho Moniz (former minister of defense). In recent months, however, there has been almost no speculation about a successor to Salazar.


The Dissenters

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Opposition political parties are illegal and those political groups which surface, as during the "campaign" which preceded the assembly elections on 7 November, are treated summarily. The Portuguese Communist Party is perhaps the best organized opposition group, but it has only an estimated 5,000 members and its leaders must operate from abroad.



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9. General Delgado led an opposition group in exile, the Portuguese Front of National Liberation, but before his mysterious death in February of this year he was ousted as leader of this group by the Communists.

10. The non-Communist opposition consists of Social Democrats, Republicans, and Progressive Catholics. In general these groups are made up of intellectuals and professional men whose chief political action has been to try to gain recognition from the Salazar regime as legal political parties. Portuguese officials have been concerned with the activity of the Social Democratic Action group which, prior to the 7 November election, showed a certain degree of organization.

#### Outlook

11. Because the present regime is so well entrenched, it is probable that the immediate transition to a successor to Salazar will be orderly, under military guidance. Over the long term, however, a successor is likely to retain less of Salazar's dictatorial powers. Moreover, the cost of maintaining the Portuguese position in Africa may lead to discontent and divisions in the regime power groups. Under these conditions the opposition groups will increase their agitation for a change in the character of the regime, and the possibility of civil strife will rise correspondingly.

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